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President: Mr. Kavan ..... (Czech Republic)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 35

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/57/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/57/621)

Draft resolutions: A/57/L.34, A/57/L.35, A/57/L.36, A/57/L.37

The President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Papa Louis Fall of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce draft resolutions A/57/L.34 to A/57/L.37 in the course of his statement.

Mr. Fall (Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People) (*spoke in French*): Before turning to the customary introduction of the four draft resolutions on the question of Palestine within the context of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I wish, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to raise several important aspects of events and facts that have affected the tormented state of Israeli-Palestinian relations and have had a negative impact on the peace process.

Time constraints do not permit me to provide Members with a documented and thorough list of the reprehensible aggression and acts carried out by the occupying Power against the Palestinian people in full disregard of agreements and arrangements agreed to since 1993, United Nations decisions and the principles of international law.

It will have to suffice that I bring to the attention of Members the following indicative and information list of recurrent and residual violations carried out by Tel Aviv in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem: blockades and curfews, the destruction of public infrastructure, arbitrary arrests and detentions, extrajudicial killings and lethal raids, the plundering of villages and refugee camps, the demolition of homes and property, the devastation of agricultural lands and the unrestrained establishment of settlements. This cycle of massacres and destruction has clearly plunged the Palestinian economy into an unprecedented catastrophic situation.

While its army systematically occupies and reoccupies Palestinian areas, blocks all access of humanitarian organizations to people in distress, cuts off all socio-economic life and radically hinders the functioning of what remains of the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli Government imposes additional unrealistic security demands on the practically ruined Palestinian Authority, whose leader, President Yasir Arafat, is outrageously held in a state of permanent

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siege and threatened personally, even with expulsion from the West Bank, an act described by Secretary-General Kofi Annan this morning in his statement read to our Committee, as one "that the international community could not accept".

Deliberately contravening the obligations imposed on it by the Fourth Geneva Convention and the principles of international law, the occupying Power pursues relentlessly a policy of establishing settlements, redrawing the map of Jerusalem on the ground and annexing certain parts of West Bank behind a "wall of security" that is under construction, nullifying therefore the very substance of conditions for a definitive settlement of the Palestinian question.

Those practices and actions, which are notoriously illegal, have been condemned, rejected or censured by the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, on the basis of careful reports, investigations and reporting carried out on the ground, including in Jenin, Nablus, Gaza, Rafah and other Palestinian cities, the well-known theatre of tragic events.

That infernal cycle of massacre, bodily injury, devastated dignity and expropriated property is occurring at this very moment. It restricts the Palestinian population and anchors them in a terrifying spiral of rage, hate and despair.

Recalling that our Committee has always condemned all forms of aggressions, intimidation and terror against civilians, wherever and whoever the victims, the perpetrators or the justifications may be, I wish to take the opportunity offered to us by the celebration of the International Day of Solidarity and our consideration of the question of Palestine, to, once again, request Israel to honour fully the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and to end its illegal policy of faits accomplis through force and violence using the pretext of security needs.

In that spirit, the Israeli Government must first withdraw from occupied and reoccupied Palestinian towns and return to its positions of September 2000, in accordance with relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. It must also remove the stranglehold on the Palestinian economy, release tax and customs revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority and lift the restrictions on the humanitarian activities of intergovernmental agencies and non-governmental organizations.

It would be worth attacking the thorny issue of the ongoing occupation of Palestinian lands, being at the heart of the question of Palestine, in order to finally allow the Palestinian people to fully exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the right to have an independent and sovereign State.

Encouraged by the Security Council's vision articulated in resolution 1397 (2002), adopting the Beirut Arab Peace Initiative in the wake of resolutions Security Council 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), our Committee believes that we move even further toward a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question. That is the direction in which the two parties should now work, with the support of the international community, particularly the United Nations. The Quartet of international mediators — the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the Secretary-General of the United Nations — are working actively with the regional actors and major donors to draw up a transition plan aimed at building a Palestinian State between now and 2005.

We support these efforts, and we hope that they will soon bear fruit in the form of a comprehensive plan with specific benchmarks and a strict timetable that will be eventually endorsed by the Security Council and strictly adhered to by all parties.

The United Nations must continue to exercise its ongoing responsibility towards all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with international legitimacy. For its part, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People remains firmly committed to making a constructive and positive contribution to this key objective through its own programme of work, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and in cooperation with all concerned — Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations bodies and civil society.

Against this backdrop, and before our colleague from Malta, Rapporteur of our Committee, presents the Committee's report to the Assembly, I will introduce the four draft resolutions approved by the Committee and circulated in documents A/57/L.34, A/57/L.35, A/57/L.36 and A/57/L.37.

Compared to the corresponding resolutions of the previous year, this year's drafts have been updated to reflect recent developments on the ground and efforts to relaunch the peace process. Moreover, the wording has been simplified, in order to avoid repetition and long references to past resolutions. Acting on the authorization granted to it by the Committee membership at the most recent Committee meeting on 7 November 2002, the Bureau held consultations to finalize the drafts under consideration, which are basically the same as the ones already approved by the Committee, with, however, the addition of a fifth new paragraph, which will be read out later.

The first three drafts relate, respectively, to the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the work of the Division for Palestinian Rights, and the work of the Department of Public Information. In the drafts, the General Assembly reaffirms the important mandates entrusted to these entities and focuses on enhancing relevant activities in support of the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and of a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine. The Committee should retain its central role and intends to make sure that resources available to it are employed in a cost-effective manner for activities that have proved useful over the years.

The fourth draft, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", reflects the position of the General Assembly with regard to the events of the past year. The draft resolution reaffirms the Assembly's full support for the Middle East peace process and welcomes the continuing efforts of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative. It stresses the necessity for a commitment to the vision of the two-State solution and the principle of land for peace, as expressed through Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002).

In the fifth operative paragraph of A/57/L.37 — which is new, having been introduced after consultations with interested parties — the Assembly

> "Also stresses the need for a speedy end to the reoccupation of Palestinian population centres and for the complete cessation of all acts of violence, including military attacks, destruction and acts of terror".

The four draft resolutions that I have just introduced reflect established positions and agreed mandates and programmes that are all of special importance to developments with respect to the question of Palestine, both on the ground and at the diplomatic level.

Our Committee wishes to express its appreciation to you, Sir. It is counting once again on the solidarity of the General Assembly, and hopes that the Assembly will express its support for these resolutions by adopting them by an overwhelming majority.

The Acting President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Walter Balzan of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Balzan (Malta): It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee (A/57/35).

In the course of the past year, the Committee continued to carry out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report I am about to present covers the developments relating to the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee since last year's report through 10 October of this year.

The introduction of the report outlines the Committee's objectives and its general perspective on the events which have taken place in the course of the year.

Chapters II and III summarize the General Assembly mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee during the year. Special emphasis has been laid on the various aspects of the situation on the ground. Also in this chapter, the Committee reviews Israeli actions and policies, including Israel's military response to the Al-Aqsa intifada; its settlement activity; actions by the Israeli settlers in the occupied Palestinian territory; the situation with respect to Palestinian prisoners; the state of the Palestinian economy; the situation with respect to water resources available to the Palestinians; action by the United Nations system; and the continuing

operational difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Chapter V reviews the actions taken by the Committee. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes the action taken by the General Assembly and the Security Council. This section makes reference to the communications addressed by the Chairman of the Committee to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council and to statements made by the Committee in reaction to events on the ground during the year. Also included here is information on the Chairman's participation in various international forums.

Section B provides a detailed account of the implementation of the programme of work of the Committee and the Division. It also provides information on the continued dialogue between the Committee and members of the European Union. The section gives an account of the various international meetings organized in the course of the year.

The Committee's cooperation with civil society; the research, monitoring and publications work of the Division for Palestinian Rights; the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL); the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People: all of these are summarized in that Section.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the work done during the year by the Department of Public Information pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/35 of 3 December 2001.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In that chapter, the Committee expresses its concern about the increasingly dangerous situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, the intensity of Israeli military offensives, growing human losses among the Palestinians, the scope of the devastation caused by the occupying forces and the enormity of the humanitarian catastrophe that has ensued. It reiterates its position that the continuing Israeli occupation remains at the core of the conflict. At the same time, the Committee unreservedly condemns all acts of violence against civilians, from whatever quarter. It emphasizes that the resolution of the question of Palestine should be achieved on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and other relevant resolutions; the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights; and the coexistence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders. The Committee also pledges to continue to work towards that objective by carrying out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly.

The Committee reaffirms its position that the United Nations should maintain its permanent responsibility with respect to all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with international legitimacy, until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people have been fully realized. The Committee also fully supports the role played within the framework of the Quartet by the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

Disturbed by the situation in Palestinian refugee camps run by UNRWA and by the Agency's persistent financial crisis, the Committee reiterates its call on the international donor community to help UNRWA to overcome the current severe crisis in order to enable it to continue its vital humanitarian work.

The Committee expresses appreciation for the contribution made by civil society organizations working to mobilize solidarity with the Palestinian people and provide protection and emergency relief to the population in the occupied Palestinian territory under very difficult circumstances.

The Committee stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's objectives and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other informational activities, including the further development of the UNISPAL documents collection. The Committee also notes the usefulness of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority and requests the Division to continue it.

The Committee expresses the view that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion about the relevant issues. The Committee also requests the programme's continuation, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

Finally, wishing to make its contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee calls on all States to join in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

I trust that the report that I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in its deliberations on this very important issue.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to express our sincere thanks to you, Mr. President, for your wise and skilful stewardship of the General Assembly during this session. I should also like in particular to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his tireless efforts to safeguard peace and security and to work for justice and for the well-being, security and stability of the world community. I would also like to thank the Chairman and the other members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their sincere efforts with regard to the question of Palestine.

Once again we are gathered here in the General Assembly to consider the question of Palestine. This debate ritual has been going on for more than 50 years, during which time there have been certain favourable political developments, accompanied by sincere Arab efforts to seek a just solution to ensure peace, security and stability and to maintain the balance of interests in the region of the Middle East. Successive Israeli Governments, however, have operated in a negative way, so as to thwart those endeavours so that they could have an opportunity to complete their settlement schemes by taking into Israel increasing numbers of new alien immigrants. This was the case in the late 1980s, when one million Russian immigrants arrived, which enabled Israel to be more capable of usurping the entire Palestinian territory and ensure its expansion and the consolidation of its regional influence. Israel alone has an arsenal of all kinds of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear ones.

The events of 11 September 2001, a major terrorist act, resulted in enormous human suffering. It was an American catastrophe, with painful repercussions on all humankind. These terrorist acts were an aggressive action against a big Power, a peaceful nation, and undermined the dignity of the American individual and that nation's sense of national security. The United States of America is the major Power. It is perceived as such by virtue of its historical responsibility as a Power capable of making an effective contribution towards consolidating global peace and security and uprooting terrorism. But, at the same time, the peoples of the world do not expect the United States to undertake this historical responsibility out of a sense of revenge or retaliation. They expect the United States to fulfil this mission to save humankind from terrorism in cooperation, of course, with other States within the framework of the United Nations and the instruments adopted by the international community. This is the only acceptable means for addressing global issues and finding appropriate solutions in the wake of the defeat of Nazism and fascism, once the norms of stability have been established throughout the world. We were expecting the United States administration to turn to the United Nations and its principal organ, the Security Council, to develop an international programme that would examine the causes and motives of terrorism and to work genuinely to remove these causes, in cooperation with and with the effective participation of those who are capable of making a difference. This would make people feel that those efforts will address terrorism effectively. These global measures should aim at saving humankind from the repercussions and tragedies of terrorism. We are convinced that such an approach would elicit world cooperation and produce positive results.

But, threats and intimidation cause concern and tension, they provoke peoples, leaders and regimes and lead to frustration and inflame tensions. This, in turn, increases the risk that terrorism will be used as a pretext for self-defence, for the protection of countries and the maintenance of their own sovereignty. It is an approach that would undermine good neighbourliness among nations and encourage people with bad intentions to exercise destructive activity. Hatred rages in their hearts so they resort to terrorism without being punished. For instance, the Government of Israel, which is headed by Ariel Sharon, exercises State terrorism in occupied Palestine, exploiting the 11 September events as a pretext for carrying out more assassinations, uprooting more trees, demolishing homes and imposing sieges on the Palestinian people for over two years.

It is Israel that is exercising a "hot-pursuit" policy everyday, after having divided the Palestinian territory into 227 cantons which are totally separated from one another in a land mass of less than 5,800 square kilometres. It is Israel that occupied the last remaining part of Palestinian territory in 1967 after it had occupied in 1948 the larger part of Palestine, after the United Nations had partitioned our Palestinian land in 1947. And the United States accepts these practices, while the peoples and Governments of the world condemn those terrorist acts.

We have accepted the American proposals in the wake of the second Gulf War in 1991, despite the Zionist invasion of our land, on the basis of the principle of "land for peace" and in implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). A series of agreements were concluded between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of the late Yitzhak Rabin. Almost two years later, the extremists — the zealots of Zionism in Israel — assassinated Mr. Rabin. With that, they assassinated every prospect of bringing about peace and security in the region.

Israel's true intentions became clear in the practices of the previous Netanyahu Government and in the evasive Barak policy aimed at aborting a peaceful settlement. At the Camp David Summit, Barak insisted on annexing nine per cent of Palestinian territory and on leasing at least 10 per cent more along the Jordan River for the long term. He demanded the establishment of three early-warning stations on Palestinian territory. Insisting on Israel's sovereignty over Jerusalem, he claimed that he had made painful concessions that were not accepted by the Palestinian Authority. Sharon, in collusion with Barak, paid a visit to the Grand Mosque of Jerusalem, and provoked and committed acts of aggression against worshippers there, acts that resulted in the killing of many Muslim worshippers by the Israeli occupation army.

The former American President, Bill Clinton, made remarkable efforts. He met with the parties to the conflict, gauged the positions of both sides and sensed the points of danger of the conflict. Mr. Clinton recognized that peaceful coexistence between the two parties was indispensable for the maintenance of peace and security in the region.

Indeed, Arabs and Jews lived in peace and security for more than 25 years during the British Mandate. Before Britain occupied Palestine, Jews and Arabs coexisted, despite the fact that the Jews were a minority. They were still able to live together in peace and security. At that time, it was expected that a Palestinian Government would be formed under which Arabs and Jews could live in peace and security and cooperation. Moreover, the United Nations, in fulfilling its mandate would support the establishment of an independent State of Palestine to prevent conflicts between religious groups. Unfortunately, and with the support of all the major Powers at that time, the United Nations changed its position and deliberately divided Palestine between Arabs and Jews. By so doing, the United Nations sowed the seeds of sectarian and racial conflict, which was fuelled by all the major Powers for many years, in pursuing their interests. Thus, they encouraged the conflict and hostilities that have continued down to our day. That intense conflict came to envelope the entire Arab region. Since its creation, Israel has been moved by its Zionist greed for power to satisfy its settlement aspirations to absorb more immigrants, to occupy an increasing share of Palestinian territory and to establish more settlements. In 1948, Israel had 26 per cent of Palestinian land, as granted by the United Nations under the Partition Plan of 1947. But Israel was not satisfied with that land. It then expelled the native inhabitants, who became refugees in neighbouring countries.

Soon afterwards, the United Nations adopted a resolution calling for the return of Palestinian refugees to their villages, cities and properties seized by Israel. At that time, the United Nations established the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine comprised of the United States of America, France and Turkey, as a mechanism to ensure the return of refugees and to correct the imbalance that was created by the Partition Plan. The General Assembly adopted resolution 194 (III), calling for the return of refugees to their homes and for compensation. But the Conciliation Commission failed in its task because Israel refused to comply with the United Nations resolutions. Israel continued to occupy 78 per cent of Palestinian land until 1967. Israel did not respect the partition resolution nor did it withdraw from the Palestinian territories, despite the statement by Shertok, the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the provisional Israeli Government at that time, that Israel would respect the Partition Plan and resolution 194 (III) on the return of

Palestinian refugees to their homeland. Israel's acceptance of the Partition Plan was an essential condition for its admission to the membership of the United Nations.

In 1967, Israel committed another aggression in collusion with a major Power. In 1967, it occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem, as well as other Arab territories in Egypt and Syria, with the support of the Powers that are known to all.

Now Israel claims that the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 are disputed territories. What is strange is that Mr. Rumsfield, the United States Secretary of Defence, declared that Israel owns those territories by right of occupation, as if those territories were public property unclaimed by anyone and therefore available to anyone able to take them.

The United States has forgotten that Security Council resolution 242 (1967) calls for Israel's withdrawal from the territories it occupied in 1967. The former United States Administration developed its plans for a settlement on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. It is strange that the current United States Administration has disregarded those plans, terminated the activities of special envoy Dennis Ross and suspended its participation in the peace process, giving Sharon, the war criminal, a free hand. Sharon has consolidated the Israeli occupation, deploying 60,000 troops and 1,100 tanks in the occupied Palestinian territories. The raging conflict has intensified in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001. The brutal, relentless state-sponsored terror campaign against the Palestinian people has thus escalated. The United States Administration blessed the actions of Sharon and called him a "man of peace", saying that Israel has the right to defend itself. Israel occupies Arab and Palestinian lands, assassinates Palestinian citizens, destroys their schools and homes, uproots hundreds of thousands of their fruit trees. All those terrorist acts have been documented in the reports of the United Nations, including reports issued by Terje Roed-Larsen, human rights commissions and many countries. All those actions and practices have also been condemned in Security Council resolutions.

By using terrorism, the Israeli Government has destroyed all prospects for peace and has nullified all agreements between the two parties. On the basis of those agreements, there was mutual recognition between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Israel during the mandate of Rabin. The Israeli Government has denied the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination, in violation of dozens of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Even more serious, the Government of Israel has destroyed the infrastructure of Palestinian society and the central institutions and systems of the Palestinian Authority, including its security system. Yitzhak Rabin had allowed that security system and security personnel to maintain security, in defense of Israel. It arrested Palestinian security personnel, laid siege to President Arafat and the Palestinian leadership and called for the President's removal. Such behaviour represents flagrant intervention in Palestinian domestic affairs. Israel has destroyed every aspect of Palestinian statehood and its political entity.

I turn now to the track of peace. Against the backdrop of all these events and facts, the Arabs put forward a political initiative to establish a just and comprehensive peace. The United States welcomed that initiative, through which all Arabs expressed their willingness to conclude peace treaties with Israel and to establish a state of peaceful coexistence among the States of the region. Israel rejected that initiative.

We welcome international efforts seeking to outline the necessary parameters of the future peace process, taking into account the appeal made by President Bush and reiterated in his statement to the General Assembly, in which he described his vision for the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side with the State of Israel within secure and recognized borders. In other words, the solution to the problem must be based on the existence of two neighbouring and independent States. Security Council resolutions 1397 (2002) and 1435 (2002) call for the establishment of such a Palestinian State. These two resolutions are an embodiment of President Bush's vision.

Thus, the Quartet was formed in the wake of the visit by Crown Prince Abdullah of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Washington, D.C., and his discussion with the United States Administration on the steps that must be taken and mechanisms that must be utilized to that end. Understandings have been reached that the peace process should be based on the Arab peace initiative, the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace and Security Council resolutions 242

(1967) and 338 (1973), as well as on President Bush's statement. There was a recognized need, however, for conditions that are conducive to action on the basis of these principles and to the development of the framework necessary if the peace process is to reach the required solutions.

From our perspective as Arabs, many matters must be addressed before we can proceed. The siege on the Palestinian people and leadership must be lifted. As a first step, Israeli forces must be withdrawn to the positions they held before 28 September 2000. International forces must be deployed in order to end the violence and to ensure that the Israeli forces cannot reoccupy the positions from which they will have withdrawn. All of these concepts have been welcomed by the United States Government.

Following President Bush's speech of 24 June 2002, in which he outlined the parameters of the peace process, the Quartet was established, comprising the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations. Discussions were initiated to develop a road map. United States Assistant Secretary of State Burns offered certain ideas that were described as "not final" and his proposals were discussed among some Arab parties.

A close reading of the text reveals the shortcomings in that road map, which uses vague and undefined expressions, such as "interim State". This is something new in diplomatic language. The road map also calls on the Palestinian side to take certain actions before the siege on the Palestinian people is lifted and Israeli terrorism is halted. It is almost as if they wanted us to draft a constitution for a state that does not exist. They want the Palestinians to abjure resistance and what they call violence, as if they were demanding that we surrender to Israeli conditions while the Israeli army is oppressing us and the Israeli siege of Palestinian territory continues. They want us to undertake reform measures under Israeli occupation, after Israel has destroyed our infrastructure, institutions and security apparatus and arrested our security personnel. It has laid siege to Palestinian cities, villages and refugee camps and committed massacres there. Israel wants us to establish a new electoral system in order to write off East Jerusalem as a legislative electoral district.

These are among the many shortcomings and vague concepts of the road map. We have been told that the final form of the road map is to be unveiled on 20 December. We note, on the basis of the draft text, that the road map in no way reflects any sense of gravity and purpose in addressing the question of Palestine.

The primary concern of the United States Administration and its ally, the United Kingdom, is to deal with the problem of Iraq. How can they justify any aggression against Iraq, which has suffered for over 10 years from relentless sanctions that have undermined the standards of living and health of the brotherly people of Iraq? They call on Iraq to destroy its weapons of mass destruction, while Israel, their ally, has every kind of weapon of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. Israel intimidates and threatens all Arab peoples, as well as Iran, with those nuclear weapons, but no one has required it to place its nuclear installations under the safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency. We call for the declaration of the Middle East as a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

The withdrawal of the Labour Party from the Israeli Government is proof of the extremism of the current Israeli Administration. It is wading ever deeper into extremism. We are worried that the extremist right wing of that Government may escalate its State terrorism, thereby diminishing any prospect for a just and comprehensive peace. Interested States and the United Nations must therefore work harder to defuse tensions in the region by ensuring Israel's withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territories and the deployment of international forces as a mechanism to ensure that withdrawal and the establishment of a Palestinian State, recognized by the United Nations under the partition resolution, that can negotiate outstanding questions. Just and comprehensive peace must be based on the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the territory defined by the borders before 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Refugees must be able to return to their villages, cities and towns according to a specific timetable. Israeli settlements must be removed.

In conclusion, this is a historical responsibility for the United Nations and the international community. We cannot see any way for achieving these noble goals to establish just and comprehensive peace except through the United Nations and the binding resolutions of the Security Council.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting here today at a time when the Palestinian intifada is entering its third year. During this time, thousands of Palestinians have died. They have died because of Israeli Government bullets and attacks and because of settler terrorists who are trying to deprive Palestinians of their property and of their rights. In the course of those years, hundreds of Israelis have also died as a result of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation of their land. Everyone knows that this worsening situation is a direct result of continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

Everyone has seen the Israeli Government's successive attempts to crush the will of the Palestinian resistance by all kinds of practices involving violence, extrajudicial killings, the closure and occupation of Palestinian towns, all while flouting international law and violating international agreements reached in the past between the two parties.

Today everyone knows that the only possible way of putting an end to the bloodletting in Palestinian territories and to the deaths of Israeli civilians is to end the occupation and to turn a new page in the relations between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

Today, everyone is aware of the fact that since 1999 successive Israeli Governments have fallen as a result of Israel's failure to deal in a positive and constructive way with the Palestinian issue. Israel continues to flout the will of the international community, to occupy Palestinian territories, to continue building settlements within the Palestinian territories and to urge settlers to settle there.

The international community must, now more than ever before, work to control the situation and prevent further deterioration. We must work towards a settlement of the conflict and confrontation, otherwise more suffering and losses will continue on both sides.

What is crucial and inevitable today is to convince Israel that its use of blind force and its reoccupation of Palestinian towns and cities will not lead to the desired security for Israel, because occupation leads directly to non-security. Security for both sides will come through peace, peace that must prevail in the relations between the two parties, and that will come only after Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

The right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State on their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital, has been confirmed by the international community for the last ten years, thanks to tireless efforts by the Palestinian people and the Arab peoples to arrive at a just and peaceful settlement in the Middle East. It was reaffirmed in September 2002 in New York by the Quartet, which has been working ceaselessly through a road map to achieve this goal by the year 2005. Here I would like to speak of Egypt's vision of what the international community can do to foster peace in the Middle East. Our vision contemplates comprehensiveness in dealing with the security, humanitarian and political tracks of a Palestinian settlement with a view to achieving balanced progress on all these tracks until we arrive at our final goal.

I would like to mention the following important elements. First, the need for balanced and parallel action on the three tracks of this desired approach. We must not focus on one and ignore the other two.

Secondly, there must be total clarity about the final objective of the peace efforts and the endeavours undertaken by the international community to activate the security, humanitarian and political tracks. There has to be a transitional period to control the tempo of the settlement. Logic would urge us to agree beforehand on the ultimate objective of the peace effort. It is the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with complementarity, continuity and sovereignty, and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Therefore, we must arrange for international political efforts during the transitional period aimed at attaining that single objective. We must be clear about the responsibilities of the various parties during that transitional period. Here I wish to point out the important role that can be played by the United Nations through the Quartet and the Security Council during the period leading to a final settlement.

President Anwar Sadat, in his statement to the Israeli Knesset on 20 November 1977, over a quarter century ago, said that achieving peace between Israel and all the Arab countries, without a just settlement of the Palestinian question, could not lead to a just and lasting peace, to which the entire world aspires. We have no doubt today about the accuracy of those words.

Not only do we need to spell out the various components and objectives of that settlement and the mechanisms needed to implement it, but we must also

be very clear about ensuring utmost rigour and determination in working to implement it within specific time periods and without manoeuvring or prevarications.

Today, at the international and regional levels or at the level of the two communities — the Palestinian and the Israeli — we need to ensure that the forces of peace and moderation triumph. They are the forces that believe in a political settlement of the conflict, whose objectives include: first, Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories occupied since 5 June 1967; secondly, the establishment of a Palestinian State that would include the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, with its capital in East Jerusalem; and, thirdly, the establishment of good-neighbourly and peaceful relations between the two States of Palestine and Israel, thereby ensuring security for both parties and progress and prosperity for the two countries.

Egypt will work toward those ends. We will work energetically and with hope. We will work to bring the parties to negotiations without further delay and manoeuvring in order to attain those objectives.

Mr. Manis (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The question of Palestine is the highest priority for us because it represents a real danger not just for the peoples of the region but also for international peace and security.

The absence of a just and lasting solution for the question of Palestine, which is the core and essence of the Middle East conflict, has led to the ongoing deterioration of the situation regarding security in the region, especially with continued Israeli occupation and modification of Arab territories and the Israeli persecution of the inhabitants of those territories, which deprives the Palestinian people of their legal and inalienable rights.

At the Beirut Summit, the Arab countries expressed their adherence to the option of peace that is based on justice and right through the initiative of Crown Prince Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz. That was a historic opportunity to establish peace in one of the most important and sensitive regions of the world. However, Israel preferred not to accept the initiative, disregarding all international and regional efforts for peace.

The developments of the past year have been very dangerous. Israel's unrestrained ambitions, hegemonic and expansionist plans and inhumane practices have demonstrated that a lasting and just peace cannot exist in the region if Israel continues to plan and execute its aggression. It is time that the international community did more than just respond to such Israeli schemes by issuing resolutions of condemnation and deploration. We call on the international community, with the Security Council at the forefront, to shoulder its responsibility and to exert pressure on the Israeli side to abide by international legitimacy resolutions for the sake of achieving peace and security in the region.

While Israel practices a policy that disregards United Nations resolutions, the international community has been somewhat complacent about that State, allowing it to continue its massacres and barbarous acts against defenseless civilians. Israel has continued its brutal killings of Palestinian people, knowing that it will go unpunished, while repeatedly flouting United Nations resolutions. Recently, Israel even refused to cooperate with the fact-finding mission following the Jenin massacres. Israel has benefited from the silence of the international community to kill international civil servants, as what happened to the senior UNRWA employee. Even the Israeli army has acknowledged this abominable crime. We expect that this crime will also go unpunished and that international legality will be sacrificed because of Israel's arrogance and intransigence.

We would like to reiterate that the only way to ensure security for Israel is by putting an end to the occupation and by withdrawing immediately and unconditionally from the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories in the Syrian Golan and Lebanese territories, in accordance with Security Council resolution 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and by allowing the Palestinian people to establish an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

We call upon all peace-loving States to compel Israel to take vigorous action to comply with international legitimacy resolutions in order to maintain the credibility of our institutions. The international community must act immediately to ensure international protection for the Palestinian people in order to achieve peace and security in the region and to resolve the Palestinian question by peaceful means.

Mr. Zarif (Islamic Republic of Iran): The report before us tells of the ever-increasing severity of the

Israeli siege and control imposed on the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. My delegation is appalled by the continuation of the aggressive reoccupation of Palestinian cities and villages over the past year. The cycle of violence, initiated each and every time by Israeli illegal acts of aggression such as targeted assassinations and the arbitrary demolition of Palestinian dwellings, has led to the loss of many lives and to enormous destruction of property, including the Palestinian Authority's infrastructure.

During the period under review, Israel persisted in its illegal policy of collective punishment. The Israeli army continued to resort to a clear policy of State terrorism. It intensified its complex system of controls imposed on the movement of persons, vehicles and goods into and out of, and between and within the occupied Palestinian territories. Checkpoints, curfews and closures, as well as the destruction of Palestinian homes, lands and groves, continued unabated. Such drastic and inhuman measures, which have thus far had a devastating impact on the already fragile Palestinian economy, run counter to any standard of the civilized world. Under the pretext of ensuring security, these acts are being deliberately perpetrated by Israel to deprive the Palestinian people of even minimal security and in a vain attempt to demoralize them.

The Israeli policy of land confiscation, aimed at expanding illegal settlements, has been the major source of tension in the area. The continuation of this policy in recent years reveals clearly that Israel has never pursued any kind of peace with the Palestinian people. The number of Jewish settlers in the occupied territories has almost doubled since the start of the peace process in 1993. In other words, Israel has continued to colonize the very land it ostensibly was negotiating to withdraw from.

It is the Israeli expansionism exemplified by this and other similar deceitful tactics and policies that has brought about the collapse of the peace process and the start of new uprisings. In this context, it is significant that during the period under review, 34 new Jewish settlements have been built on Palestinian land in the West Bank.

More than half a century since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), the Palestinian people have yet to exercise their right to self-determination. Over the years, scores of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions have been adopted with a view to putting an end to the Israeli occupation and enabling the Palestinians to exercise their national rights. To this day, they all remain unimplemented.

The Security Council, which has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, should play an important role in promoting a fair, just and viable solution to the Middle East question. Regrettably, the Council has thus far failed, for obvious reasons, to take any serious and tangible action, or even to attempt to implement its own modest and limited decisions. Despite Security Council resolutions 1402 (2002), 1404 (2002) and 1435 (2002), the Israeli army has yet to withdraw from the reoccupied Palestinian territories. Security Council resolution 1405 (2002) on the investigation of the bloody Israeli invasion of the Jenin refugee camp has remained unimplemented. Moreover, the Council has yet to take any action, such as sending international observers to the occupied territories, to protect Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation and to maintain a measure of peace and stability.

The question of Palestine lies at the core of the Middle East issue. Recent developments in Palestine not only threaten the wider region, but also are having an increasingly negative impact on peace and stability throughout the world. Tension in the region continues to escalate, and the situation in the Middle East, rather than improve, has further deteriorated.

The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territory is not very different. It continues to be another source of tension in the region, and the Israelis have thus far indicated that they are not intent on considering a withdrawal from the Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territory. Rather, they have made repeated attempts to alter the demographic and legal character of the area by establishing new settlements and imposing their laws on Syrian citizens in the Golan, in contravention of all relevant Security Council resolutions.

We note that all efforts made in recent years to de-escalate the Palestinian conflict have been torpedoed by the callous and belligerent Israeli positions and actions — positions and actions that further prove that Israel is adamant in its defiance of international law and of the will of the international community. Undoubtedly, without the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinians, including

their right to independent statehood, it will be impossible to arrive at a fair, just and lasting solution to the crisis in the Middle East.

In conclusion, let me express my delegation's appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; to its Chairman, Ambassador Papa Louis Fall; and to its members for the comprehensive report they have provided and the actions the Committee has carried out to ensure the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people. This work must continue until we reach a final resolution of the question of Palestine by establishing an independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Benmehidi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): The item on the question of Palestine is being considered this year against a particularly disturbing backdrop, with a very serious deterioration in the political, security and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and in the absence of any prospect for a settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict, despite the increasing number of proposals, both international and regional, to try to resuscitate the moribund peace process.

The Israeli occupation continues with its cortege of horror, brutality, destruction and aggression against the Palestinian people and the symbols of the Palestinian Authority. This has totally wiped out all of the progress made since the launching of the Oslo process, which the Israel leaders have today declared has lapsed. This is after they systematically, deliberately and, we fear, irremediably weakened and discounted it.

The situation has never been as explosive nor as perilous to peace and security in the region and in the world as it is today, for tension is high and the cycle of violence seems to be irreversibly spiralling out of control. Israel is ever more recklessly using its formidable death machine to crush the resistance of the Palestinian people. It is continuing its settlement policy and, without a moment's thought or hesitation, uses tanks and missiles against defenceless civilians. Israel has thus decided to take the worst possible approach and has deliberately turned its back on peace.

Indeed, while the Palestinians have made a courageous and definitive strategic choice for peace and welcomed the recent proposals, Israel has locked itself into a position of refusal and intransigence and is trying relentlessly to intimidate and weaken President Yasser Arafat, confining him inside his residence, destroying the offices of the Palestinian Authority and rendering it completely incapable of playing its part, including its role in maintaining public order, at a time when it has begun, with great courage, to undertake a large-scale reform effort. Yet at the same time, Israel is reproaching the Authority for doing nothing to contain the legitimate anger and frustration of the Palestinian people, who are placed under siege and humiliated on a daily basis.

Despite repeated appeals from the international community, in particular the Security Council, which has adopted no less than five resolutions during the course of this year — 1397 (2002), 1402 (2002), 1403(2002), 1405 (2002) and 1435 (2002) — demanding that Israel respect international law and withdraw from territories occupied by force, Israel continues to disregard the rules of international law, including humanitarian law, and to flout the will of the international community, secure in its conviction that it will go unpunished, through its implacable policy of occupation, settlement and repression of the Palestinian people.

As the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has reported, during the past year the inhuman practices of the Israeli military campaign have had a devastating impact on the humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, leading to unspeakable suffering for the Palestinian people. This has given rise to a very serious humanitarian crisis, as all United Nations agencies have reported. The international community was profoundly affected by the tragic events, which it followed almost live on television, that took place in the Palestinian refugee camp at Jenin during the two-week Israeli offensive there, and it has not yet been able to assess the material damage that was done to the Palestinian infrastructure during that attack. The humanitarian crisis will simply worsen the situation and feed the instability that already exists.

Algeria has followed closely and with great concern the worsening of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Once again we reiterate our strong condemnation of ongoing attacks by the Israeli army against innocent civilians, their property, their institutions and their holy places.

Given that the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to life, are being flouted, we urge the international community and the United Nations, in particular the General Assembly and the Security Council, to provide the protection that Palestinians need through an adequate international presence. Such a presence must be real and effective and could take the form of official observers in sufficient numbers, provided with a clear mandate. Better still, it could take the form of a multinational force, under Chapter VII of the Charter, as proposed by the Secretary-General.

The parameters of a final resolution of the conflict are widely understood. Any solution must involve a full withdrawal by the Israeli occupying forces from the occupied territories, including the Syrian Golan and the enclave still occupied in Lebanon. Despite the excesses of the Israeli occupiers, during the Beirut Summit the Arab League outlined the basis for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in Palestine and the Middle East. The Arab initiative was given wide support at the regional and international levels, and has the potential to relaunch the peace process leading to a just, definitive and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The co-sponsors of the peace process should take advantage of that Arab spirit of openness and seek to relaunch it, establishing a framework for coherent negotiations with a view to arriving at a favourable solution, based on international law and the principle of land for peace, in accordance with the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The American vision of two States living side by side, as articulated by President George Bush and endorsed by the Security Council, is certainly a step in the right direction.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the strong support of Algeria for the heroic struggle of the Palestinian people and their just cause in their quest to regain their inalienable rights, including the right to establish an independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): We thank the Secretary-General and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their reports on the situation in the Middle East and on the question of Palestine.

For two years now, the Middle East has been in the grip of escalating and often brutal violence. There has been an unprecedented series of deliberately inflicted setbacks to the peace process. A final settlement, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2001), and the Saudi peace plan, endorsed by the Beirut Arab Summit, appears to be even further away than it was a year ago.

We deplore the repeated manifestations of Israel's complete disregard for its obligations under international law. Israel is under an obligation to observe and implement the Fourth Geneva Convention. In accordance with articles 27 and 32 of that Convention, protected people must not be wilfully killed, tortured, ill-treated, subjected to corporal punishment or suffer humiliating and degrading treatment. In this context, several recent killings of innocent Palestinian children and the shooting of an official of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East by Israeli security forces must be strongly condemned.

Article 33 the Fourth Geneva Convention further states that protected people must not be subjected to collective punishment or reprisals against their persons or property. Yet the destruction of houses and the uprooting of Palestinian families remains the favoured mode of Israeli coercion and retaliation against the Palestinian population. Israel's violations of the Geneva Convention regarding the provision of social and economic facilities to the occupied people have an even more pervasive and negative impact on the lives of the Palestinian people.

Israel is furthermore violating the provisions of several international human rights instruments, which enjoin respect for the right to life and prohibit inhuman and degrading treatment, even during times of public emergencies.

International law also prohibits the transfer of the civilian population of an occupying Power to the territories under its occupation. The persistent establishment of Israeli settlements are a significant and central reason for the aggressive posture and actions of the Israeli occupation forces and the dogged resistance of the Palestinian people. It was a major reason for the derailment of the Oslo peace process.

In his recent address at the University of Maryland, Secretary-General Kofi Annan aptly

illustrated the distress and frustration of the occupied Palestinian people. He said:

> "Confined by roadblocks to their towns and villages, and much of the time by curfews in their homes, the Palestinians watch hilltop after hilltop covered by new Israeli buildings, and valley after valley criss-crossed by roads reserved for Israeli settlers."

Israel's creeping colonization of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, its excessive use of force, its reoccupation of Palestinian territories and towns, its wilful destruction of the structures of the Palestinian Authority, its disregard for international law and the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council — all of these have combined to create an environment of insecurity, violence and virtual anarchy in the Palestinian occupied territories.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people, in document A/57/35, reiterates that the "continuing Israeli occupation remains the core of the conflict" and must be addressed without further delay. Indeed, the root cause of this conflict lies in the occupation. Only by focusing on this reality can we fully understand the tragedy called Palestine and reaffirm the principle of self-determination for the Palestinian people.

Furthermore, the Committee has

> "continued to stress that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the following essential principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination". (A/57/35, para. 2 of Introduction)

Pakistan adds its voice to this call from the Committee, encapsulated in the principle of land for peace and reflected in the Beirut Arab Summit peace plan.

A just and durable peace in the Middle East can be achieved only when the world community, including the United Nations, plays its rightful role in upholding respect for the principles that are the foundation of global peace, stability and security, as enshrined in the United Nations Charter. We cannot insist on strict observance of these principles by one State but offer another the impunity to flout these principles at will.

Pakistan has closely followed the deliberations of the Quartet. It is our hope that the Quartet's forthcoming meeting will lead to the charting of a course of action to break the endless cycle of violence in the region and move finally towards a just, negotiated and final settlement.

It is a moment of grave responsibility for all parties. They must act with circumspection and with foresight. The people of Palestine must be offered hope immediately, even if we cannot offer them justice or peace at this time. We can create such hope by affirming commitment to the ultimate goals set out in the Security Council resolutions, by securing a halt and reversal in Israeli settlement policies, by securing Israel's observance of the Geneva Conventions, and by achieving a reversal of Israel's recent reoccupation of Palestinian territories.

Hope can help to end the cycle of repression and violence. The global community must not fail to give the Palestinian people, at least, hope for peace with justice at this time that is one of the darkest hours in the century-old tragedy of Palestine.

Mr. Saleh (Bahrain) (spoke in Arabic): First of all, I would like to express my thanks to Ambassador Fall, the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people, for his comprehensive report and for his efforts and those of the Committee to protect and defend the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Israel, the occupying authority, continues to practise terrorism and aggression against the Palestinian people for over two years now. Israel's occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories has also continued since 1967. Successive Israeli Governments have continued to practice methods and policies of establishing settlements, whereby settlers are brought from all over the world and Palestinians are being driven away from their lands and those of their forefathers.

Israel is continuing its series of war crimes, crimes against humanity and State terrorism against unarmed Palestinians, who are suffering bitterly from

these barbaric Israeli practices. Israel is the only State in the world that is occupying the territories of others by force and the only colonial power in the twenty-first century.

The Bahraini delegation takes this opportunity to reaffirm its condemnation of all forms of international terrorism, especially State terrorism, which is now being practised by the Israeli occupying forces on a daily basis. This is the most serious form of terrorism. In this respect, we would like to reiterate the need to distinguish between terrorism, which we reject in all its forms, and the legitimate struggle against occupation and aggression. Moreover, my country condemns the assassinations and the extrajudicial killings that have been carried out by Israeli forces against the Palestinian people. This runs counter to Article 3 (d) of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. This is part of the process of war crimes committed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, in addition to expelling Palestinians from their homes and destroying their homes, and persisting in its settlements policies that run counter to most basic international rules and laws.

My country also condemns Israel's practices of confiscating and seizing thousands of acres of Palestinian property in order to erect a wall of separation — a Berlin Wall in the twenty-first century. This measure has been taken by Israel, the occupying Power, and will isolate eight Palestinian villages with a population of 10,000 Palestinians. These villages will be isolated between the green line and the wall of separation, which will hinder the citizens of the West Bank from reaching their farms. Construction of the wall will lead to an annexation of seven per cent of the occupied territory of the West Bank.

The international community and the United Nations must, now more than ever before, exert all types of pressure on Israel, the occupying Power, to put an end to these major violations of international law, human rights and international humanitarian law. Even assistance personnel and United Nations employees have not been spared in these attacks. Recently, Iain Hook, the UNRWA employee in charge of reconstruction at the Jenin refugee camp, was killed by the bullets of Israeli soldiers.

All Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories have had serious psychological, social and economic repercussions for Palestinians and have caused a growing number of Palestinians to be displaced from their homes. That has fuelled the conflict's intensity and increased the load that international assistance organizations, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, have to bear. There has also been an impact on people's income and unemployment has risen sharply. Independent international reports have recently revealed that malnutrition in the occupied Palestinian territories is reaching alarming levels.

The occupation and those dangerous practices constitute the most serious threat to international peace and security. That should motivate the United Nations, especially the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibility by guaranteeing the Palestinians international protection under the auspices and supervision of the United Nations in order to put an end to the current serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Israeli forces of occupation against the defenceless Palestinian people. Otherwise, Israel will continue its violations and will challenge and flout United Nations resolutions, while the international community fails to react.

We hope that the United Nations and the other international parties involved will continue to exert pressure on Israel, the occupying Power, to compel it to return to the negotiating table and to end the policy of terrorism and aggression that it has been waging for the last three years. It is in that context that my delegation reiterates its support for the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Beirut Summit in March 2002, as that initiative is an Arab invitation to peace and an Arab rejection of violence.

But Israel has refused to respond to that sincere initiative. It insists on pursuing a policy that cannot lead to any kind of peace and stability. Only dialogue, negotiation and the implementation of United Nations resolutions can put an end to this problem and bring about peace and stability in the region, through the establishment of a Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and the return of all refugees and displaced persons to their homes.

Mr. Wang Yingfan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Since it began in September 2000, the conflict between Israel and Palestine has continued for more than two

years. Not only has it caused a serious humanitarian crisis for both sides, aggravating mutual hatred and hostility and undermining economic development and social stability for both sides, particularly for the Palestinians. It has also led directly to the stagnation and even serious reversal of the Middle East peace process, posing a threat to peace and stability in the entire region. The deterioration of the situation in the region has become a cause of great concern for the entire international community. All countries have the obligation to help the Palestinians and Israelis to end their violent conflict and to resume the Middle East peace process.

At the heart of the question of the Middle East, the question of Palestine calls for a resolution whose urgency is becoming increasingly clear. To press for a political settlement of the question of Palestine through peaceful negotiations is in keeping with the fundamental desires of the Israeli and Palestinian people and all the people in the region. It is conducive to peace and stability in that region and should be the common aim of joint efforts of the international community and all parties concerned. As the largest and the most authoritative intergovernmental organization, the United Nations has made a great effort and contribution in promoting a ceasefire and the resumption of negotiations between Palestine and Israel. China wishes to express its appreciation for this. We hope that the United Nations will play a greater role in promoting the Middle East peace process.

As a firm supporter of the Middle East peace process, China maintains that the Security Council resolution 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and the principle of land for peace should be the basis for peace negotiations. The legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish an independent State, should be realized at an early date. We oppose the military aggressions and economic blockades by Israeli authorities in the Palestinian-controlled areas.

At the same time, we oppose and condemn the series of suicide bombings targeting civilians. We believe that violence begets violence and can only lead to more casualties and hatred. It will not bring about the peace and security fervently desired by the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. On many occasions, China has called upon the Palestinian and the Israeli sides to respond to the efforts made by the international community in the interest of peace by adopting a series of measures to end armed conflict and to end the cycle of violence. China stands ready to work with the international community to promote a just and very reasonable solution to the Middle East question.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, my delegation would like, first of all, to reaffirm the unswerving support and solidarity of the Government and people of Malaysia with the people of Palestine in their struggle to achieve their inalienable rights. As we participate in this important debate on the question of Palestine, we cannot but feel discouraged and dismayed that the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, continues to be very grave and volatile. We condemn the continuing spiral of violence, including the recent terrorist attacks in Mombassa. Clearly, those acts of violence, which have claimed so many innocent lives, will only heighten tensions between the two sides.

My delegation is deeply concerned that, despite the international efforts that have been made to restore security and put the peace process back on track, there has been no tangible progress. We deeply regret the heavy toll of casualties on both sides. The number of dead and injured has been exceedingly high, particularly among Palestinian civilians, many of them children. The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/57/35) estimates that of a total of 1,800 Palestinians killed since the start of the intifada in late September 2000, 300 of them were children under the age of 18. The Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, Mr. John Dugard, reported that children were killed not in crossfire, but mainly when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) randomly opened fire and shelled civilian neighbourhoods. Over 20 children have been killed "collaterally" in the course of the assassination of alleged militants. Amnesty International, in its extensive research on the actions of the IDF in Jenin and Nablus between April and June this year, concluded that the IDF had carried out actions which violated international human rights and humanitarian law and that some of the actions amounted to grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War and were therefore war crimes. These illegal actions include unlawful killings, the use of Palestinians for military operations or as human shields, torture and ill treatment of Palestinians

in arbitrary detention, obstructing medical and humanitarian relief, and the demolition of houses and property.

My delegation strongly condemns these actions. We note with regret the lack of a sense of outrage on the part of the international community at these inhumane actions by the Israeli forces, much of which unfortunately has been eclipsed by the frenzied media attention on the prospects of military action against Iraq.

We are all too familiar with the illegal Israeli occupation policies and practice of indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force and heavy weaponry, extrajudicial killings, destruction of homes and infrastructure facilities, severe mobility restrictions and closure policies, and other forms of collective punishment against the Palestinian population. We are also all too aware that they have caused enormous hardship and misery to the Palestinian people. These policies and practices continue to be carried out by Israel despite the concerns raised by the international community and in complete disregard of relevant United Nations resolutions. Instead, they seem to have been further intensified as we have recently observed from the reoccupation of Nablus on 13 November and the raids in Tulkarem and an adjacent refugee camp on 12 November, Jenin on 22 November and other areas of the Palestinian territory in recent weeks.

These draconian measures have increased the frustration and hopelessness of the Palestinian people, who see no prospect for the future but the continuation of their dismal lives under Israeli occupation in extreme poverty, living in shelters or homes under threat of imminent destruction, lack of basic needs and medical services, poor health conditions, disruption in education, lack of employment and under constant fear for their lives. This state of affairs can only deepen the sense of despair on the part of the Palestinian people and provide fertile breeding grounds for militancy and extremism, thereby further jeopardizing prospects for peace.

My delegation reiterates its strong conviction that only the urgent intervention of the international community could ease the violence and address the dire situation on the ground, including providing much-needed protection to unarmed civilians. We believe that, under the present circumstances of heightened tension between the two peoples, only the forcible separation of the two sides would be able to provide the peace and security conducive to the resumption of negotiations. Malaysia, along with many other countries, has long urged the Security Council to establish a strong interposing international protection mechanism which would have the immediate effect of defusing the explosive situation on the ground and instilling confidence between the two sides. The Secretary-General himself has made a similar recommendation. We therefore urge once again that a robust international protection force be deployed without further delay. We cannot afford to let the violence spiral out of control or allow this conflict to remain unresolved indefinitely.

Another aspect of this conflict which must be highlighted again and again is the provocative Israeli policies of confiscating Palestinian-owned lands on a massive scale and demolishing Palestinian houses for the purpose of expanding or establishing new Israeli settlements and constructing security fences, buffer zones and bypass roads linking settlements. For instance, the construction of the so-called separation wall near the Green Line, as indicated by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs in his briefing to the Security Council on 12 November, was a cause of heightened tensions, as it involved the confiscation of a large area of Palestinian agricultural land and cutting off the access of West Bank residents to their agricultural land and water resources. Once completed, the wall would annex 7 per cent of the West Bank. This action can only be read as a deliberate attempt by Israel to prejudice the right of the Palestinians and pre-empt the contours of a permanent territorial settlement. As always, Israel uses security as a rationale and pretext for the illegal annexation of more Palestinian territory. We fear that the illegal settlements, the bypass roads and buffer zones which have divided the Palestinian people from their land will jeopardize the realization of a sovereign and viable Palestinian State as they destroy the territorial integrity of the occupied Palestinian territory.

We are dismayed that Israeli settlements continue to be established in violation of the sixth paragraph of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and numerous United Nations resolutions that have condemned settlements as illegal. On the contrary, Israel wilfully violates its obligations in this regard by encouraging settlers to stay on or move to new settlements by offering cheap housing, discounted

loans and tax incentives. We consider such encouragement to settlers as provocative and irresponsible, as it fuels the tensions between the two peoples.

Mr. Sharon's endorsement of the aims of some settlers to establish a settlement at the recent Hebron ambush site is ample proof of this reckless settlement policy, which ironically jeopardizes rather than enhances the security of Israelis. Settler violence against Palestinians has been reported as a growing problem, particularly during the harvesting period. Palestinian olive-pickers have been attacked and killed. It is even more appalling that groups of armed settlers, often protected by Israeli soldiers, have not been prevented from using their firearms and assaulting Palestinians, including children. Settler tactics against Palestinians to drive them away from their homes and disrupt their lives are being condoned by the Israeli authorities.

It is dismaying that Israel continues with its settlement policies in spite of the lack of international support for them. Clearly, what is needed is a robust and unambiguous message from the international community, especially from Israel's closest friends and supporters, that such policies are short-sighted and not in the long-term interest of the people of Israel. We hope that such a message could influence Israel to desist from pursuing policies that are clearly counterproductive to the quest for peace and security. We hope that Israel can also be convinced that its continued occupation of the Palestinian territories is the root cause of much of the violence. Clearly, if Israel is serious in seeking peace with the Palestinians, the immediate cessation of settlement activities, followed by the dismantling of settlements, would be a truly positive move towards easing the tension and a concrete step towards the peaceful solution of the problem.

Malaysia continues to encourage and support every international effort aimed at achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). We believe that the international community has a compelling responsibility to intensify its efforts to find a peaceful and durable solution to the conflict. In this regard, Malaysia reiterates its support for the important efforts of the Quartet, as well as other interested parties, and looks forward to the implementation of initiatives aimed at relaunching the peace process.

Malaysia will continue to express and manifest its strong support for the Palestinian people in the quest for the restoration of all their inalienable rights, including their right to establish an independent and sovereign State. We are confident that the Palestinian Authority, under its current leadership, will be able to steer the Palestinian people towards the realization of that goal.

Mr. Lancry (Israel): As is the custom, the General Assembly is today taking up the question of Palestine on the anniversary — the fifty-fifth — of the adoption of resolution 181 (II), which through the partition plan recognized the right of both peoples — the Jewish people and the Palestinian people — to self-determination. While Israel established an independent State on the basis of the Assembly's resolution, the Palestinian leadership, along with the leaders of certain neighbouring Arab countries, decided to reject resolution 181 (II) and initiate a war whose declared purpose was the destruction of Israel.

As a matter of fact, the sharp criticism of the United Nations and its partition resolution offered this very day by the head of the Palestinian delegation, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, is nothing but the symptomatic expression of the Palestinian refusal to come to terms with true coexistence with Israel.

It is that rejection that has plunged the Middle East into more than half a century of wars, entailing suffering and hardship for all the peoples of the region. These wars persisted until the emergence of extraordinary leaders such as President Sadat of Egypt, King Hussein of Jordan and Prime Ministers Begin and Rabin of Israel, who took courageous action to reposition the Middle East within the orbit of peace. The peace treaties between Egypt and Jordan and Israel are highly significant milestones on the road towards comprehensive peace in the region.

In 1993, with the historic signing of the Oslo Accords, Israelis and Palestinians turned a corner. Leaders on both sides appeared ready to usher in a new era, one based on the mutual recognition of the legitimate rights and claims of both sides and anchored in a fundamental commitment to renounce violence and terrorism and settle all outstanding issues through a peaceful process of negotiations.

Seven years later, in September 2000, following the most comprehensive compromises ever proposed by an Israeli leader, the Palestinian leadership departed from that fundamental commitment and launched a campaign of violence and terrorism that continues to this day to claim innocent lives. The Palestinian resort to terrorism destroyed the optimism of the Oslo years. It has derailed repeated efforts to restart a process of negotiations aimed at achieving a lasting settlement. And it has forced the Government of Israel to elevate the security of its citizens to the highest national priority.

Israel has been criticized for its singular focus on providing for the security of its people, seemingly disregarding the need for a viable political horizon for the Palestinian people. But what country represented here today would do otherwise in the face of a calculated, orchestrated campaign by the leadership of a neighbouring people to claim as many innocent civilian lives as it can? Israel's insistence on security is not some blind obsession. Nor is it a mindless ritual. Indeed, security is the very essence of peace. It is the soul of peace. It is not some commodity to be bartered and traded, to be bestowed and withdrawn subject to the whims of our Palestinian partners. It must be the central pillar, the unalterable foundation and the most integral stratum of any concept of peace.

When Israel successfully concluded peace treaties with its neighbours Egypt and Jordan, security was not a by-product of the peace process. It was its very foundation. President Sadat's landmark speech before the Israeli Parliament, to which my dear colleague Ahmed Aboul Gheit referred moments ago, calling for an end to wars and bloodshed, paved the way to the first Arab-Israeli peace treaty, one which we hope will be followed by many more. His sincere and resolute declaration rendered questions of procedure and terminology insignificant. Israelis and Egyptians had no need to waste precious days and months debating the merits of the parallel approach as opposed to the sequential approach. The unshakeable commitment to security — to peace — was present, and all the rest was commentary. With Egypt, peace and security were two sides of the same coin.

We have, on occasion, heard similar rhetoric emerge from the Palestinian leadership. Chairman Arafat too has spoken of a future free of wars. And in his speech before the Assembly on this item last year, the head of the Palestinian delegation, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, conveyed the Palestinian commitment to fighting international terrorism. Today, he also referred to ways to address global terrorism. Mr. Kaddoumi's commitment of last year, as well as his concerns of today, would be best fulfilled by addressing, first and foremost, the scourge of Palestinian terrorism and its sinister practice of suicide bombing.

But in the more than two years since Palestinian terrorism became a daily reality for the people of Israel, and despite the sporadic condemnations by Chairman Arafat and his representatives of certain acts of Palestinian terror, never has the Palestinian leadership taken any significant action to give substance to its rhetoric. Palestinian terrorists continue to freely roam the streets, despite an explicit Security Council call, in Council resolution 1435 (2002), to bring them to justice. Anti-Israeli incitement continues to pervade the Palestinian media and educational system despite a similarly explicit Security Council directive that it be unconditionally halted. The mass killers of Israeli children continue to be hailed as martyrs and heroes rather than condemned as the murderers they truly are. And at the United Nations, every attempt to adopt a resolution expressly condemning Palestinian terrorist groups and suicide bombings has been blocked by automatic majorities.

The Palestinian terrorist campaign does not bespeak an irrevocable commitment to peace and reconciliation. Rather, it evokes a continuation of the Palestinian policy of rejection of Israel — a rejection of Israel's right to exist, of the right of its people to live in peace and security and of its right to live within secure and recognized boundaries as a full and equal partner in the quest for regional stability and prosperity. Violence and terrorism eviscerate the very core of peace.

The basic concept of peace remains the one articulated by the General Assembly more than half a century ago and refined by Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). More recently, that vision was reaffirmed by President Bush's speech of 24 June 2002, by Security Council resolution 1397 (2001), and by the road map now being formulated by the Quartet. All those are predicated on recognition of the basic right of both peoples to self-determination. Israel has accepted the vision of peace articulated by the President of the United States, a vision that includes two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. But all those formulas are

destined to failure if they are not rooted in the absolute rejection of the strategy of terrorism and the adoption of a clear policy of reconciliation and coexistence.

Those efforts to bring peace to the Middle East must consider the end of terrorism as the price of political progress, not as its reward. Failing to do so would convince Palestinian terrorists that their efforts to achieve political gains through indiscriminate violence have borne fruit. That is a clear prescription for more terrorism, not only in the Middle East, but also around the world. Such a misguided approach, suggesting the establishment of a Palestinian State as an inducement for the Palestinian leadership to crack down on terrorist organizations, is the surest guarantee that terrorism will continue to be the defining feature of Palestinian policy.

Recently, we were again reminded of the nature of the terrorist threat and of the horrific global consequences of failing to confront it. In Kenya, the so-called Army of Palestine claimed responsibility for the attempt to blow up an Israeli airliner carrying 271 civilians and for the attack on an Israeli-owned hotel that killed 16 people and wounded scores of others. In a statement issued in Beirut, the group made explicit their opposition to General Assembly resolution 181 and to the very idea of partition and coexistence between Jews and Palestinians. In that respect, the group is very much in accord with Palestinian terrorist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which make no secret of the fact that they are engaged in a fight aimed at Israel's eradication. And in Israel, members of Chairman Arafat's own Fatah movement claimed responsibility for an attack that killed six civilians and wounded dozens more outside the office of an Israeli political party in the northern town of Beit She'an.

As recent events demonstrate, everyone in this Hall has a vested interest in ensuring that no terrorist group is rewarded, regardless of the justice of its cause. In a world newly awakened to the threat posed by terrorism to the very foundations of the civilized world and recommitted to eradicating that scourge from the world, these are not considerations to be taken lightly.

As others have stated before, the quest for peace requires not only that certain political steps be taken, but also that we adopt the language of peace and tolerance, as expressed in the way leaders address their people, in the way teachers teach their students and in the way religious leaders inspire their followers. If this language of peace can be adopted, not only in the Israeli-Palestinian context, but any place where violence threatens the security of human beings, nothing is impossible. The optimism once embodied by the peoples of the region could be restored in an instant if the political will existed to replace the rhetoric of hatred with the vocabulary of coexistence.

The peoples of the Middle East, who have suffered the ravages of war for so long, are deserving of another chance to make the dream of peace a reality. In an age of manifold and exciting opportunities, we cannot deny our children the possibilities of the future by condemning them to reliving the horrors of the past. It is my hope that our Palestinian partners will join us in recommitting ourselves to recapturing the lost spirit of peace and to working to bring about a more peaceful and secure future for all the peoples of the Middle East.

(*spoke in French*)

As I come to the end of my term as Permanent Representative of the State of Israel, I would like to conclude this statement on the question of Palestine on a more personal note, first of all to reiterate my unshakeable belief in Palestinian-Israeli peace, which is being challenged by everything right now, but which history and justice will cause to happen. Today, Israeli-Palestinian peace seems seriously at risk, frozen in a tragedy of the absurd, of terror and violence. Like Stéphane Mallarmé's *Hamlet*, the peace process seems like "the king always becoming, but who never became".

Yet, that peace will come because it draws its sustenance not only from political sources — decisive yet uncertain — but also from the philosophical underpinning of the Oslo agreements, namely mutual recognition. Mutual recognition at its core reflects the ideological right to exist legitimately, having the physical presence of the State of Israel, on the one hand, and the evolving physical presence of the Palestinian State, on the other. If the Oslo agreements include a historic revolution, a major turning point in Israeli-Palestinian relations, it is because those two agreements reflect a basic journey for the two peoples — the journey from the principle of mutual denial that prevailed before the Oslo agreements to the principle of mutual recognition that followed Oslo.

At a time when the Palestinians and Israelis are tearing each other apart, speaking about mutual recognition would seem rather utopian. Yes, terrorism

and violence cast a pall on the conscience of peace and cover mutual recognition with a veil of non-recognition, a hermetically sealed screen, a screen of alienation.

It must be said and acknowledged that some journeys begin in pain, suffering and tribulation. In that regard, we would recall François Mitterrand's wise comment just after the collapse of the Communist world, when he spoke about the difficult and often turbulent journey of the young democracies of Eastern Europe from communism to liberalism. Mitterrand said, "One cannot move from an old order to a new order without some disorder".

That is true today of Israelis and Palestinians. Emerging from age-old hatred and rejection, Palestinians and Israelis cannot begin their journey from mutual denial to mutual recognition without it producing the tragic consequences we face today, because it is formidable and violent all at once. In the Israeli-Palestinian situation today one can say that there is from the sublime to the tragic only one step, if not one misstep. I was thinking about that nihilistic straying a few days ago, when I was talking spontaneously, free of the customary constraints of diplomacy, with two Arab Ambassador friends. I share with them not only the same outlook, coming from an age-old shared Judeo-Arabic past, but also, and above all, an intellectual, spiritual and emotional affinity that is likely to transcend danger and political contingencies. One of them said, following a very insightful and honest analysis, that what we all need is a little more soul.

From this rostrum, I wish, in acknowledging that lofty concept — the need for a little more soul — to end with a wish for peace. This is a blessing inspired by a Hebrew verse, in which the Eternal, our God, brings peace to those far and wide so that there can be full and complete healing.

I shall now recite this verse in Arabic so that we can speak in different ways of a peace that will bring reconciliation:

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Peace! peace to those far and wide.

Mr. Andrianarivelo-Razafy (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): Our debate this year is taking place in a context that is ever more worrisome for the international community, given the tragic turn of events of the past few months in Palestine. The hope to which the progress of the past two years had given rise is gradually diminishing and giving way to discouragement and frustration. How could it be otherwise when we see the situation deteriorating on a daily basis, resulting in a horrifying number of victims, most of whom are women and children? Every new victim reignites animosity and hatred in the hearts of people tormented by years of insecurity and suffering and thus moves them ever further from the path of mutual agreement and peace.

That path, which is the path of dialogue and negotiations, now seems long and difficult. However, it is the only way to break the hellish cycle of destruction and distrust and replace it with a cycle of cooperation and confidence. Without such confidence, it will be difficult to keep alive any hope of arriving at a new relationship between the Israeli and the Palestinian people.

Towards that end, Madagascar appeals to the two parties to show restraint and to refrain from any acts that could exacerbate feelings of anger and suspicion. Madagascar would like to take this opportunity unreservedly to condemn all acts of violence and terrorism against civilians, irrespective of their perpetrators, such as those that took place recently in Mombasa. We believe that it is also vital to comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions and existing arrangements for the re-establishment of mutual trust between the two peoples. Too much blood has been shed and too much suffering endured. How much more time must be wasted and how many more lives lost before the two sides decide to break this deadlock?

Madagascar acknowledges that the quest for a just and lasting peace can take place only in the context of a willingness to make concessions that are sometimes painful and call for both political courage and will. But this is an attainable goal, as evidenced by the Oslo Accords and the Wye River Memorandum. Peace in the Middle East must not be put on hold indefinitely, as it is a key component of international security and stability. Israel's aspiration to live in a secure environment is not incompatible with the right of Palestinians to have their own place in the sun.

In this spirit, Madagascar would like the vision of two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side within secure and recognized borders, as set out in

resolution 1397 (2002), to become a reality and thereby enable the advent of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Indeed, Madagascar continues to believe that the definitive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will contribute to the establishment of peace and prosperity in that region as well as promote security in international relations. With this in mind, Madagascar deems it urgent and important that the international consensus on the creation of a Palestinian State be translated into concrete action through a clear-cut mechanism that is acceptable to the parties involved.

Given the gravity of the situation, Madagascar reiterates that there can be no successful resolution of the question of Palestine without a sustained and unequivocal commitment on the part of the United Nations in the context of the peace process. Today more than ever the United Nations must fully shoulder its historical responsibility vis-à-vis this issue. It falls to the Security Council, as a pivotal organ in the maintenance of international peace and security, to monitor compliance with, and the implementation of, the resolutions aimed at putting an end to this conflict, which has lasted for far too long.

Madagascar pays tribute to the constructive role being played by the Secretary-General and encourages him to persevere in this respect, in cooperation with the co-sponsors of the Middle East peace process. We hope also that the efforts made by the Quartet will lead to the creation of a framework for negotiations agreed by the parties. We, the members of the international community, convinced of the validity of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, must support both individual and collective efforts to assist the parties to overcome the obstacles that are hindering the peace process. This is a sacred duty which the international community must not shirk, because respect for the value of human life and of justice depend on it.

Even though it is up to us all to work to relaunch the political dialogue, it is the parties themselves ultimately that will have to shoulder the primary responsibility of ensuring that a lasting solution is found. The well-being and happiness of both peoples is at stake, as is the advent of the peace to which we all aspire.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Our debate today on item 35 of the General Assembly on the question of Palestine is taking place on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Since this item was discussed last year, the tenth emergency special session was resumed for the seventh time, and the Security Council has held a number of meetings on this topic.

However, the crisis in the Palestinian territories is becoming ever more serious. The number of people killed or wounded has doubled in the past year; most of them were innocent civilians and one third of them were children.

Israel's armed forces continue their incursion into territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority, with total disregard for the human cost of such actions. Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories are expanding. Military occupation and closures are daily occurrences, worsening the economic paralysis and jeopardizing the very survival of a large part of the Palestinian people. The destruction of their houses and property; of their religious, cultural and historical sites; and of the institutions of the Palestinian Authority should be strongly condemned.

These ongoing mass violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people are the most flagrant and systematic in the world today.

Repeated attacks against the headquarters of the Palestinian National Authority have become routine. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat can scarcely move away from what little remains of his headquarters, still less travel abroad because of the threat that he will not be able to return to his homeland.

Israel's State terrorism knows no limits. Arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial killings have been institutionalized and occur on a daily basis.

Cuba regards the heroic struggle of the Palestinian people against Israeli occupation and aggression to be legitimate, and we express profound solidarity with them in their resistance and intifada.

At the same time, Cuba condemns suicide bomb attacks and other acts of violence against Israeli civilians — innocent victims of the spiral of violence caused by their Government's policies — while rejecting the manipulation of such isolated actions aimed at bringing into question the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-defence and justifying selective and large-scale actions against them.

How many General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on the question of Palestine are being flouted by Israel? International law, international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 are all being trampled underfoot on a daily basis.

The United Nations has a part to play in seeking a solution to the question of Palestine. The Assembly must lead this effort, given the evident inability of the Security Council to ensure the implementation of its own binding resolutions.

It is clear that the Security Council is applying a double standard. Almost half of the vetoes cast by the United States in the Security Council — a total of 36 — have related to the question of the Middle East. On 24 of those occasions the issue was directly related to the situation in the Palestinian territories illegally occupied by Israel. That total does not take account of the many threats of veto that resulted in many draft resolutions never being put to the vote or in the significant watering down of others. We repeat that the United States must immediately stop providing Israel with financial support that is used for bellicose purposes, as well as military supplies, including tanks, helicopters, missiles and aircraft that are used against civilians.

One week ago Mr. Ian Hook, who administered a rehabilitation project in the Palestinian camp at Jenin, became the third member of the team of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to lose his life while carrying out his job in the occupied Palestinian territories. Having been shot by the Israeli army, Mr. Hook died before reaching the hospital because the Israeli Defense Forces refused to provide immediate access to an ambulance requested by UNRWA.

Twenty-three Palestinians working for UNWRA in the West Bank are currently being held by the Israeli authorities, most of them without any charges having been brought. When UNRWA requests information, the Israeli authorities respond with silence, and no access is provided to them. That failure to cooperate with a United Nations mechanism that has been working there for more than half a century is utterly deplorable.

The spiral of violence caused by the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territories must end. The illegal occupation of those territories must end. The desperate situation of some 4 million neglected Palestinian refugees, both within and outside the territories, must cease. Death and suffering there must cease.

Cuba condemns all acts of aggression and State terrorism by Israel against the Palestinian people. We once again express our firm solidarity with the Palestinian people and urge all delegations to vote in favour of the four draft resolutions before the Assembly in support of the Palestinian cause, including the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent sovereign State in their territory, with its capital in East Jerusalem.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, as well as the European Free Trade Association country of the European Economic Area, Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

The Middle East has been through yet another year of violence and tragedy. The appalling events of recent weeks exemplify this all too well. Bloodshed, confrontation and provocation have been accompanied by violence, terrorism and military measures. And sadly, once again, it has been ordinary Palestinians and Israelis who have been held hostage by the conflict and have paid the price in terms of human suffering, disillusionment and mistrust.

The European Union is gravely concerned about the continued clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. We strongly condemn violent attacks targeted at innocent civilians on either side, including the recent acts of terror and violence. Force cannot defeat force. It only serves to undermine efforts to promote dialogue on security, reform and a final settlement. The continuing cycle of violence must stop if the almost daily loss of life among the Palestinian and Israeli civilian populations is to be prevented.

The European Union calls on the Palestinian Authority to do all that is humanly possible to fight terrorist acts against Israel and to bring the perpetrators, instigators and sponsors of terrorist acts to justice. Likewise, it calls on Israel to stop the use of excessive force, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, deportations, the demolition of houses and

infrastructure and the confiscation of property, and to bring to justice the guilty under due process of law.

The Israeli reoccupation of areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority and its intensified occupation of Palestinian cities, as well as the severe restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of persons and goods, serve only to aggravate the extremely tense situation. Furthermore, it places severe constraints on the ability of the Palestinian Authority to implement the necessary reforms called for by the international community, as well as by Israel, to prepare for elections and to work to ensure the rule of law. We call on Israel to lift the blockade on the occupied territories and withdraw its forces from Palestinian cities to the positions held prior to September 2000. Moreover, Israel should ensure full, safe and unfettered access to the occupied territories for humanitarian personnel and assistance.

Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories must stop. Such unilateral actions are illegal under international law and prejudge a final settlement. It is imperative that they be ended immediately. The European Union fully supports the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, and reconfirms in this regard that the Palestinians have an unqualified right to self-determination and to the creation of an independent State. Likewise, Israel has the right to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. We reaffirm, in this regard, the importance of the Arab peace initiative endorsed at the Arab League Summit.

More than ever, a clear political perspective is needed in order to ease tensions and rekindle the hopes and aspirations of the peoples in the region for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

At the international level, serious efforts have been undertaken to restart political talks on the basis of a concrete road map outlining the steps towards Palestinian statehood.

Within the Middle East Quartet, the major international players have shown their commitment to try, once again, to broker a final settlement between the parties. The European Union remains committed to continuing the work within the Middle East Quartet on a concrete, three-phased road map towards a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement within three years. We call on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to work actively with the Quartet on the road map.

A just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine must be based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the Madrid terms of reference, in particular the principle of land for peace, and the implementation of all existing agreements between the parties.

Above all, it is up to the parties themselves to seek peace through a process of negotiations. For such a process to be successful, it requires that both parties recognize and accept the elements that I have just outlined as the basis and the goals for a final settlement.

For its part, the European Union remains ready, in close cooperation with the other members of the Quartet and all parties concerned, to assist in efforts aimed at finding a final and just settlement to the Middle East conflict.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.